

IT JUST had to happen sooner or later. And on Saturday tigerish Walthamstow Avenue became the only team to crack Wycombe Wanderers' 100 per cent record with the first goals scored against the Blues in 591 minutes of Isthmian League football.

But on recent performances, the result came as no surprise. Avenue took a point in the corresponding match last year and after they had beaten John Maskell for the first time, there was only one team in it.

Although Wycombe were always on top throughout the first half, their performance in the second period was disappointing. They lost control of midfield and could never cope with a bone-hard ground.

The pitch at Green Pond Lane was really a disgrace to the standard of Isthmian League football. It looked more like a golf course than football pitch with two large 'bunkers' in each half. Bearing in mind that no ground will look at its best without rain, Wycombe are unlikely to meet such atrocious conditions again this season.

Wanderers themselves must be praying for rain. Their style of football is totally unsuited to the current state of pitches. On Saturday they never had enough time to construct attacks and until the ball runs more smoothly with less bounce, they are unlikely to be at their best.

The conditions did little to help their defence either. With two tall back men in John Delaney and Gerry Olsen, they lack the mobility of last year, when Ted Powell provided a perfect foil to the towering Delaney. The Blues are unlikely to lose out in the air but on the ground, they have problems.

Blues' boss Brian Lee can hardly be happy with his full back predicament either. Paul Birdseye was unconvincing in the number two shirt and with Ian Rundle and Dave Bullock on the sidelines, there will probably be plenty of experimenting before a solution is found.

With Delaney heading narrowly over his own crossbar and Birdseye's back pass only just finding 'keeper Maskell, Wycombe got off to a shaky start. But Keith Searle almost sneaked a goal for the visitors with one of the best moves of the game.

A short throw from Maskell found Birdseye who put Searle through with an astute through ball. Racing on, the centre forward out-paced the defence but crashed his shot into the side netting.

Barry Davies also went near with a 20 yard drive that scraped the crossbar with home 'keeper John Payne well beaten. Davies continued to stamp his authority on the game until half time but then faded out of the game completely in the second period.

Just before half time Keith Searle was sent sprawling by 'keeper Payne but the referee, at least 30 yards away, turned down Wycombe's appeal. Had Searle's dive been less dramatic, he may well have stood a better chance of gaining the decision.

So Wycombe's defensive record had survived (with ease) another 45 minutes. Yet it took only six minutes of the new half to crack that record and send Wycombe on their way to their first league defeat of the season.

Brian Jackson was allowed too much space and tried a pot-shot from 25 yards. Maskell, off his line, could only parry the ball to West Indian centre forward Delroy Rhoden who gleefully knocked the ball into a vacant net.

A few minutes later Jackson went into the referee's book after an aerial clash with Delaney, the linesman spotting some offence by the veteran inside forward.

But the booking did nothing to deter Jackson or any of the Avenue team from taking over the game. From then on it was virtually one way traffic. While skipper Brian Wilson

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held things steady at the back, Walthamstow's confidence grew sky high.

Alan Carrington blazed in one drive just over the top and then in the 73rd minute, laid on the second and killer goal. It was a leaf out of Wanderers' book with centre half Wilson running in to head the ball strongly past Maskell from Carrington's corner in true Delaney style.

Wycombe's faithful supporters did their best to raise their team but with no pattern up-

front and the loss of midfield control, they had little to hope for.

The occasional chance went begging and later they deteriorated badly with not even the elementary passes finding their mark. The introduction of Alan Gane for Robb Williams did little to improve the situation. While Tony Amos, Wycombe's new international forward, looked anything like an England player and has yet to strike up an understanding with Searle upfront.

WALTHAMSTOW: J. Payne, R. Almons, R. Redman, T. Smith, B. Wilson, S. Trice, A. Carrington, R. Wiles, D. Rhoden, B. Jackson, J. Roseman, sub P. White (not used).

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, D. Gamblin, G. Olsen, J. Delaney, B. Davies, R. Williams (sub A. Gane 77 mins), L. Pritchard, A. Amos, K. Searle, M. Holifield.

Referee: C. I. Boswell (Gillingham).

Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorers** (Walthamstow) Rhoden 51, Wilson 73.